

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 07350 051157Z

43

ACTION EA-10

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, KS

SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM SOMEWHAT EXPANDED

REF: SEOUL 7106 AND PREVIOUS

1. KOREAN PRESS HAS ENJOYED RELATIVE DEGREE OF FREEDOM SINCE CONFRONTATION AT DONGA (REFTEL) AND DEQUEL. ALTHOUGH NO PICTURES ARE PERMITTED, PRESS HAS CONTINUED CARRY STORIES OF STUDENT UNREST. THESE ARE RELATIVELY SHORT BUT FREQUENTLY SINGLE ACCOUNTS OF INDIVIDUAL INCIDENTS ARE GROUPS TOGETHER AND ATTAIN GREATER IMPACT. THIS IS CONSCIOUS PRACTICE BY EDITORS AS SIGN OF DEFINANCE. STUDENT STORIES ARE NOW OFF PAGE ONE AND BACK ON PAGE SEVEN WHICH IS LOCAL PAGE, BUT THIS MAY BE VIEWED AS NORMAL SINCE NEWSWORTHINESS THESE STORIES HAS DECLINED TO SOME DEGREE.

2. COVERAGE OF VIETNAM STORY WHICH WAS ONCE PUT OFF RESERVATION BY ROKG CONTINUES, BUT COLUMN INCH LENGTH IS DECLINING; AGAIN, THIS MAY BE VIEWED AS NORMAL IN TERMS NEWS VALUES.

3. WHILE YONTAN STORY HAS DISAPPEARED, PRESS IS STILL CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 SEOUL 07350 051157Z

COVERING WHAT LOCAL JOURNALISTS DESCRIBE AS "SAD

STORIES" CONCERNING KOREAN ECONOMY. SOMETIMES APPEARING ON PAGE ONE BUT USUALLY ON ECONOMIC OR CITY PAGES INSIDE, THESE HAVE RANGED OVER WIDE VARIETY OF SUBJECTS INCLUDING GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT AND EXPORT DECLINES.

4. DEBATE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION IS STILL GIVEN PAGE ONE PROMINENCE INCLUDING ACCOUNTS NDP BOYCOTT AND SUBSEQUENT INTER-PARTY HAGGLING.

5. PRESS SOURCES SAY EDITORS STILL RECEIVE TELEPHONED GUIDANCE FROM MCUI, ROK CIA, MND AND BLUE HOUSE PLUS ALMOST ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY OR INDIVIDUAL WHO FEELS NEED TO PROVIDE SUGGESTIONS AS TO PRESS PLAY ON ANY ITEM OF VITAL INTEREST TO CALLER.

6. MOST JOURNALISTS TO WHOM WE HAVE TALKED FEEL CURRENT DEGREE OF PRESS FREEDOM WILL CONTINUE UNTIL AFTER PRESIDENT FORD'S VISIT WHEN, ACCORDING LOCAL PRESS JOKE NOW CIRCULATING, ROKG WILL IMPOSE 2EMERGENCY MEASURE NUMBER FIVE." THIS, STORY RUNS, WILL CONSIST OF ONE SENTENCE ANNOUNCING REIMPOSITION OF DECREES ONE THROUGH FOUR.

7. COMMENT: RELISTACALLY ROKG HAS LARGELY MET DEMANDS OF JOURNALISTS GROWEING OUT OF DONGA INCIDENT. SOURCES WITHIN DONGA TELL US THAT IF ROK CIA DETAINS JOURNALISTS AGAIN, THEY WILL, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR ANNOUNCED INTENT, INSIST ON PRINTING SOTRY, BUT OUR BEST ESTIMATE IS ROKG WILL STRIVE PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS. PRESS FATE IN POST-PRESIDENTIAL VISIT ERA SEEMS TO US LESS CLEAR CUT THAN LOCAL JOURNALISTS SEE IT. ROKG MAY CONCLUDE THAT SITUATION AS IT STANDS IS SOMETHING BOTH PRESS AND ROKG CAN LIVE WITH FAIRLY INDEFINITELY BARRING UNTOWARD DEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS LARGE SCALE LABOR DISTRUBANCES, HEIGHTENED STUDENT UNREST AND TRULY DEVASTATING ECONOMIC NEWS.

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